

Gender and High School Organization: Insights on Leadership Styles in the Niger Delta Region

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Abstract

The position of the school principal as a leader is incontrovertible. The problems that plague the school system are so numerous that those who are within the educational system are so overwhelmed not to talk of outsiders who are poised to ask such a pertinent question like “are the principals leading the schools well?” If the principals among the male and female are sophisticated with the theories and practice of management, to what extent do they quantitatively involve the rightful leadership styles to direct the affairs of their various schools? The sex of the principal has equally become very important in a study of this nature. Every person within the school system looks forward to the principals to give the appropriate leadership for others to follow. The sex of the principal from previous experience reveals that the strength of character and dynamism is needed to achieve or reach some administrative goals. The female principals may be intimidated by the enormity of the school problems and get carried away or accept the situation as it is. This study examined the quality valuation among the male and female principals in their choice of leadership styles in Rivers State of the Niger Delta

region. The principals, the teachers and the student were all required to make their contributions to ascertain what style of leadership that is commonly adopted by the male on the one hand and the female principals on the other. The analysed data shows that the female principals qualitatively involve the democratic style of leadership than the men. The female principals also involve their staff in decision-making than does the male counterpart, the male principals, who adopted the democratic and the autocratic styles of leadership are quicker at the management of crises in schools than the female principals.

Keywords: females, males, school, principal, leadership styles

Introduction

The position of the school principal as a leader in his own world is incontrovertible, the problems that plagues the school system are so numerous that those who are within the educational system are so overwhelmed not to talk of outsiders who are poised to ask such a pertinent question like; “are the principals leading the schools well?”. If the principals among the male and female are sophisticated with the theories and practice of management, to what extent do they quantitatively involve the rightful leadership styles to direct the affairs of their various schools? The sex of the principal has equally become very important in a study of this nature. The position of the principal as a leader within the school is so important that Adesina (1980) noted that:

To a very great extent, the success of the school depends on its principal. He/she is the leader and he must be prepared to give and lead. If he/she is keen, lively and conscientious, his examples will be followed by his teaching and non-teaching staff and pupils. If he is lazy and uninterested, the school will become second rate.

Every person within the school system looks forward to the principals to give the appropriate leadership for others to follow. Adesina (1980) maintained that the principals are “where action is”. Leadership is commonly referred to as management – as getting others to do something. Luthans (1985:475) noted that:

Throughout history, it has been recognised that the difference between success and failure, whether in a war, a business, a protest

movement or a basketball game can be attributed largely to leadership. Yet, despite all the attention given to it and its recognized importance, leadership still remains pretty much of a "black box" or unexplainable concept.

What Luthans is saying is that leadership is known by many to exist and to have a tremendous influence on human performance but its inner workings and specific dimensions cannot be precisely spelled out. It is nevertheless generally known as a group thing rather than an individual thing. The Ohio group of research, under the leadership of Lewis Kurt - the father of "group dynamics" - has taken to the old conception of studying leadership. The known commonest styles of leadership are the democratic, autocratic and the laissez faire.

The Ohio study elicited the reaction of youths in social clubs formation to the different styles of leadership. The study revealed that children in clubs with democratic leadership style showed much interest and were readily prepared to partake in more activities as they initiate structures. Members of the autocratic leadership style developed some dislike for the leadership style and expressed some frustration in the process. The people in the laissez faire group even preferred it to the autocratic leadership style. The gender of the leader is most important as a determining factor in choice of leadership style and the effective management of the school in general.

The current happenings in school system like increased failure rate, secret cult formation, the unabated trends in examination malpractice, the principals and staff feud, academic rivalry and a spate of unwarranted transfer of teachers, the poor salary regime and lack of needed social facilities and benefits to teachers and the entire working public requires that the principal who knows how best to organized the work force to achieve the goals of the school, whether a male or female, be given the high responsibility of leading the different schools in the State.

The sex of the principal from previous experience reveals that the strength of character and dynamism is needed to achieve or reach some administrative goals. The female principals may be intimidated by the enormity of the school problems and get carried away or accept the situation as it is. After all the women are already piqued in a war of words with men regarding their right denial and marginalization in the scheme of things within the school system.

The great awareness among the children, the parents and the shrinking in size of the world as a global village owing to much improvement in international communication requires the school leaders both male and female to wake up because it is not the time to play to the gallery on the basis of gender factor. The teacher would definitely share part of the blames for the sol called “falling standards of education”, even though the falling in standards of education is still being debated as to whether it is a real or a myth.

The study is a contribution along this line for it tries to find out the differential that exists between the male and female principals of qualitative valuation and principal choice of leadership styles and application in the management of staff and the students in general in Rivers State. The amount of money the State “is committing to the education” of our children at this level is much, and much more will continue to be so committed to that and other levels. The secondary education is such an important aspect to the youth, which cannot and should never be sidelined for any reasons. The moment it is known among educationists, who among the male and female principals chooses the right type of style for the management of the schools, a vital discovery would have been made. This type of quality valuation among the female and male principals will definitely help future managers of the schools. This is what underscores the importance of this study.

The problem defined

There exists a number of literature on what roles the principal should play in the leadership of the school. In playing some given roles, the male or female principal’s ability to make a qualitative value judgement and their need disposition will enable them choose the right style of leadership to achieve the needed goals (Getzel and Guba’s 1957) and Lipham and Hoeh, 1974) notes that there are still some degree of disagreement on the boundaries of the main roles of the principals. The principal functional areas, when the appropriate valuation of the right leadership style is to be used to give effective leadership are:

- A - Instructional programme supervision
- B - Staff personnel administration
- C - Student personnel administration
- D - Financial and physical resources and administration
- E - School community relationships administration

It was Adesina (1980) that gave this classification. The leadership of the male and female principals is highly needed in curriculum development, personnel co-operation, in decision making and project execution. This is why Campbel (1971) noted that curriculum and instructional leadership tasks are of paramount importance if the school is to achieve its goal of enhancing teaching and learning. Supporting this same stand on curriculum decision-making and implementation, Adaralegbe (1972:20) said:

Of all the multifarious roles the modern principal is assumed to play no one is greater than his role as a curriculum leader. The principal can hardly exist in a school situation where no instruction is going on, or where no course of instruction is planned, tried, evaluated and put into practice.

Many studies have been carried out that acknowledged the leadership position of the school principal in recent years. Fafunwa (1971) recognized that the principal is the overall administrator of the school, the supervision of staff, students, the curriculum planner and the community relation developer. The types of leadership adopted by the teacher along the line to achieve these several goals within matters to a large extent. In recognition of the enormity of this responsibility squarely on the principals' shoulders was what made Sergiovanni and Career (1973:15) to say that:

Of course, educational organisations are much too complex for effectiveness to be attributed to any single dimension. Nevertheless, leadership owns a fair share of responsibility for effectiveness.

It is now clear to all educational administrators in all schools in Rivers State that their position is a highly sensitive and enviable place of leadership that must never be held with negligence and operated ineffectively. This position was buttressed by the federal government in the National Policy in Education (1981) thus:

Government will work towards improving the quality of secondary education by giving support to measures that will ensure effective administration. These will include the right calibre for principal ship of schools the mounting of induction courses for new appointed principals, and prompt disciplinary steps to deal with principals who misuse their powers or prove inefficient.

The high rate of failure in school certificate examinations yearly, the unexpected proliferation in examination misdemeanour and cheating, secret cult formation among teenagers, and unparalleled wanton destruction of life

and properties of colleagues in schools, the intolerable fight between the principals and teachers on the one hand and the students and teachers on the other has made (Soli and Deveine, 1976) to cast aspersion on the leadership roles of the principals.

Earlier on, Ejiogu (1990), study on male and female principals of Imo and Anambra States; it was found that the female principals were more of the initiating structure than their male counterpart. Cambel (1971) in his pioneer study of secondary school principals in the United States also reported leadership style differences along the lines of sex-role socialisation orientation. The findings revealed that most of the female principals were reported to be autocratic.

The position taken by another researcher like McKinney (1975), has shown that the female principals are better administrators than their male counterparts whoa re described as more chauvinistic and authoritarian in the various roles in the secondary school administration. The study is, therefore, keenly interested in placing in perspective the following questions:

- The extent to which the male and female principals differ in their adoption of leadership styles in secondary schools in Rivers State.
- The extent to which the male and female principals differ in their involvement of their staff in decision-making in their schools.
- The extent of difference between male and female principals ability to use the right styles of leadership to manage crises in secondary schools.
- The extent to which differences exist between male and female principals emphasis on the use of appropriate leadership styles to achieve curriculum and co-curriculum goals of the schools.

Materials and method

This study was carried out in some randomly selected secondary schools in Port Harcourt municipality of Nigeria. The population consists of principals of government owned secondary schools, teachers including the vice-principals and the Head of Department and the senior secondary school students who have spend about six years in their schools. The stratified random sampling technique was used to obtain the sample of 14 principals; that took care of the seven male and female principal headed schools, the 24 vice-principals, the 56 heads of department and teachers who have spent nothing less than 6 years in their schools. The choice of the 120 senior secondary students who had been in the schools for a period of 6 years was so stratified to ensure that the students' contribution was not faked in any

way. The principals, the teachers and the students were all made to respond to the sole instrument of the study.

The instrument used for this study was the Principal Leadership Style Adoption and Usage Questionnaire (PLSAUQ). This 24-item questionnaire was in five main sections including the personal data of the respondents. The instrument addressed issues related to the principal adoption of leadership styles, owing to his value for its importance, involvement of the staff in decision-making, management of cases and adoption of most valuable leadership styles to achieve the curriculum and extra curricular goals of the schools. The reliability of the instrument, based on the test-retest method, that involved Pearson product moment – correlation formula was $r = 0.81$. The test of stability and consistency was therefore compared, when the coefficient of α was compared with the fishers transformation of $(Z_n - Z_r)$ table score. The respondents were required to respond to the items of the instrument wanting to know how the principals involved the three leadership styles of *democracy*, *autocracy* and *laissez faire*. The response categories were “Always”, “Often”, “Occasionally”, “Seldom” and “Never”. Each response was weighted accordingly with value from “Always” = 4 to “Never” = 0. On collection of the data simple frequency counts based on their responses and as weighted were analysed in percentages.

Results

The following results presented in the tables 1 – 4 clearly show how the different respondents, that is the students, the teachers, the vice principals and the principals have seen these principals in this part of the country choose and apply their leadership styles for the control and management of their various institutions.

Table 1 shows how the different respondent sees the principals' valuable choice of leadership styles separately and collectively.

Table 1 show that the female principals are more democratic with 41% than their male counterpart with 40%. The data analysis equally reveals that the male principal uses autocratic style of leadership more than the female principal with a percentage of 2, as reflected in a bracket. It can be seen also that the female principals with 5% chose to use the Laissez faire style of leadership than their male counterpart with just 2 percent.

Table 2 has shown again that the principals are more democratic than being autocratic or involving the laissez faire style. The total summation in the table shows that while 51 percent of the female rapidly delegate the

decision making in school. More respondents were in agreement that principals adopt the democratic style of leadership as 91% of the principals were said to involve their staff in school decision-making. Some also agree that 8% of the laissez faire choosing principals involve their staff in decision-making.

Table 3 shows the difference between the male and female principals' ability to manage crises situations in the schools. Some 31% of male principals involving the democratic leadership and 24 percent of the female principals the same democratic style are rated as being able to manage crises situation. It is rather interesting to note that it is also shown on the table that 26 percent of the male principals and 9 percent of the female principals involving the autocratic strategy are able to control and manage crises situations in schools. In general 55% of the principals that involve the democratic style of leadership and some 35% of those principals involving the autocratic style of leadership were said to have been successful in managing crises in their schools.

Table 1: The Percentage Difference in Male and Female Principals' Choice of Leadership Styles in Rivers State

Group	No of Resp.	Principals Sex	Democratic Leadership Resp.	% Response	Autocratic Leadership Resp.	% Response	Laissez Faire Resp.	% Response
Student	120	M	50	(42)	8	(7)	-	-
		F	60	(50)	-	-	2	(2)
Teacher	60	M	22	(37)	10	(17)	3	(5)
		F	14	(23)	4	(7)	7	(12)
Principals	14	M	6	(42)	1	(7)	-	-
		F	6	(42)	-	-	1	(7)
Total	194	M	78	(40)	19	(10)	3	(2)
		F	80	(41)	4	(2)	10	(5)
<i>Grand Total</i>	194		154	81%	23	12%	13	7%

Table 2: The Percentage Involvement of the Staff in Decision making by Male and Female Principals

Respond in the Group	Number of Resp.	Principals Sex	Democratic Leadership Resp.	% Response	Autocratic Leadership Resp.	% Response	Laissez faire Resp.	% Response
Students	120	M	48	(40)	-	-	6	(5)
		F	63	53)	-	-	3	(3)
Teachers	60	M	25	(41)	-	-	-	-
		F	30	50)	-	-	5	(8)
Principals	14	M	5	(35)	-	-	2	(14)
		F	6	(43)	1	(1)	-	-
Total	194	M	79	(40)	-	-	8	(4)
		F	99	51)	1	(1)	8	(4)
<i>Grand Total</i>	194		177	91%	1	1%	16	8%

Table 3: The Percentage Difference in Male and Female Principals in management of Crises Situation

Respond in the Group	Number of Resp.	Principals Sex	Democratic Leadership Resp.	% Response	Autocratic Leadership Resp.	% Response	Laissez faire Resp.	% Response
Students	120	M	38	(32)	20	(17)	-	-
		F	32	(27)	10	(8)	-	-
Teachers	60	M	18	(30)	24	(40)	-	-
		F	12	(20)	6	(10)	-	-
Principals	14	M	5	(36)	6	(43)	-	-
		F	2	(14)	1	(7)	-	-
Total	194	M	61	(31)	50	(26)	-	-
		F	46	(24)	17	(9)	-	-
<i>Grand Total</i>	194		107	55%	67	35%	-	-

Table 4: The Percentage Difference between Male and Female Principals emphasis on Goals Achievement based on Right Leadership styles

Respond in the Group	Number of Resp.	Principals Sex	Democratic Leadership Resp.	% Response	Autocratic Leadership Resp.	% Response	Laissez faire Resp.	% Response
Students	120	M	52	(43)	7	(6)	9	(8)
		F	42	(35)	-	-	10	(8)
Teachers	60	M	20	(33)	-	-	-	-
		F	30	(50)	-	-	10	(17)
Principals	14	M	5	(36)	-	-	2	(14)
		F	4	(29)	3	(20)	-	-
Total	194	M	77	(40)	7	(4)	11	(6)
		F	76	(39)	3	(2)	20	(10)
<i>Grand Total</i>	194		153	79%	10	5%	31	16%

Key:

M = Male Principal F = Female Principal (*) = Percentage Response

Table 4 shows how the different principals valuably chose the leadership styles with which they emphasise the achievement of goals of their schools. There was no perceptible difference seen between the male and female principals using the democratic style of leadership. The only area of difference was noted was with their assessment under those who adopted the laissez faire was 6% male and 10% female were said to be concerned with the use of the appropriate type of leadership style for goals achievement.

Nevertheless, as many as 79% of those using the democratic type of leadership, 5% of those who are pro-autocratic leadership style and 16% of those with laissez faire inclination are concerned with the use of the most valuable styles of leadership for the achievement of goals.

Discussion of findings

The special ability to critically evaluate and decide on the right combination of leadership styles to achieve given goals in a school system is not evenly spread among school leaders. This is borne out by the fact that it is not all school leaders are equally gifted. The finding in this study has shown that the female principals are more democratic in their choice of

leadership style to sue than their male counterpart. The findings quite agree with the findings of McKinney (1975). This in the main, makes the appointment of female principals into municipal secondary schools, where highly qualified and politically aware teachers a sine-qua-non.

Unfortunately, this study has equally shown that some female principals are often more autocratic in their choice of leadership than their male counterpart. This findings is however at variance with what (McKinney, 1975) described in male principals as more chauvinistic and authoritarian in the various roles in the secondary school administration. In recent years with the women now taking the roles of men and with the “spirit of women liberation programme”, women tend to be over-assertive about their positions in administration. Often their much orchestrated campaign and propaganda is targeted at the men folk they regard as the enemy that sideline them in control positions. This study, finding that women who now blend both democratic and autocratic styles of leadership is a proper step in the right direction. This is highly needed to achieve the much-needed peace in any school environment.

This study has also shown us that the female principals are equally more prone to the laissez faire style of leadership than male principals are. This does not show a qualitative valuation of leadership style before choosing one. It is this type of situation that may have led (Soli and Deveine 1976) to cast some aspersion on the leadership roles of the principals.

The fact that female principals had come out very strong when they shows that they qualitatively value the use of the democratic and autocratic styles of leadership makes this study very unique. This would have put the women fold far ahead of the men in quality valuation of leadership styles. But it has again been shown in this study that the female principals resort to the use of the laissez faire style of leadership than their male counterpart, shows that female principal are nevertheless more superior to the male principals in quality valuation and choice of leadership styles in the management of schools in Rivers State.

The female principals are shown in the study to involve the teachers more in decision making than their male counterpart. This shows that the women are more democratic in their choice of style of leadership than the male counterpart. The laissez faire style adopting principals are equally involving their staff in decision making. This situation is found to be very common with the female principals than the male principals. This is a minus point on the part of the female principals.

The male principals were found to be more tactical with the use of the democratic style of leadership to arrest the crises situation than their

female principals. More men principals who are prone to autocratic leadership style manage crises than the female counterpart.

Again, there was no much difference observed between the male and female principals in their choice of leadership styles to achieve the main goals of their schools. Their use of the democratic style of leadership more than the autocratic and laissez faire style may have accounted for this. Once the system is used to one main dominant style of leadership, the leaders can hardly change to autocratic or laissez faire style over night.

Summary and conclusion

The male and female principals were found to involve more of the democratic style of leadership than the autocratic and the laissez faire style of leadership. The leaders have been shown to try their hands in the different types of leadership style in their schools. This is saying that the principals must have found some useful elements among these three styles of leadership styles. Given the fact that different principals face different situations in their places of administration daily, it will not be out of place to proffer these suggestions.

The principals should though a most researched procedure adopt the most valuable leadership style in their schools. The situations that require management decisions in the school are many. It is not what happens today that is expected the next day. Therefore given the circumstances in the school the principals should be tactful in using a blend of the leadership styles.

The democratic style of leadership is highly praised as the best style because it involves consultation with other staff and a general involvement of all in the processes of decision-making. The moment the staff of the school feel a sense of belongingness, they will be willing to contribute their best towards the achievement of the goals of the organisation.

The leaders out of wisdom must under-study the different styles of leadership, so that they can adopt the most appropriate method at the most ripe situation. This is what makes the real stuff of an administrator. Rigidity to one particular style of leadership has no place in the leadership of a tried and tested leader in the school.

Goals and result-orientation is the main target of the principal with the right valuation for the choice of method to use. This author is not here condemning the autocratic and laissez faire style of leadership, but is rather highly recommending the most school principals in the State should be more tutored and oriented towards the democratic ideals in leadership in their

schools for fast goals achievement and the involvement of the higher percentage of their personnel in active and efficient participation.

The future outlook of this type of study should seek to involve more male and female principals from more states of the federation. There is the need to expand the scope of the study to involve other schools in larger parts of the state as well. If it is possible, the school leaders should be involved in some training and retraining of refresher courses in order to give them more information along these new research findings that are very unique in the global age.

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